HISTORY
OF THE
PERSIAN LANGUAGE

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THE HISTORY
OF THE
PERSIAN LANGUAGE;
AND
AN ESSAY ON THE POETRY OF THE
EASTERN NATIONS.

BY

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THE HISTORY

OF THE

PERSIAN LANGUAGE.

MOST of my readers will apprehend, that, in attempting to trace the progress of the Persian language, through a period of two thousand years, I am entering into a subject, which will afford them neither amusement nor instruction, and can be agreeable only to those few men, who apply themselves to the obscurer branches of literature, and have very little intercourse with the rest of mankind. The title of my piece seems, indeed, to give a reasonable ground for their apprehensions; and the transition appears rather abrupt, from the history of Monarchs to *the history of mere words*, and from the revolutions of the Persian Empire to the variations of the Persian idiom: but it shall be my endeavour to remove, as far as possible, the dryness of the subject, by interspersing the narrative with a variety of Eastern anecdotes; and, as to the second objection, it may be alleged, that *a considerable change in the language of any nation is usually effected by a change in the government*; so that *literary and civil history* are very nearly allied, and may often be used with advantage to prove and illustrate one another.

The History of the Persian tongue may be divided into *four periods*, like that of the Empire; not that

the language was immediately altered upon every revolution of the state, but it is observable, that, under each Dynasty of which we have any monuments remaining, there was an apparent change in the dialect of the kingdom, especially under the two last, namely, the *Sassanian and Mohammedan* dynasties: and these, indeed, are the only periods, of which we can speak with any degree of certainty.

It is natural to suppose, that, in the infancy of the Persian Empire, under Caiûmaras and his descendants, no great pains were taken to cultivate and polish the language, which in that rude age must needs be thought sufficiently elegant, if it were sufficiently clear and intelligible: and we are assured by Herodotus, that, even after the reign of CYRUS, *the whole education of the Persian youth, from the age of five years to twenty, consisted in three points only, riding, throwing the javelin, and the practice of moral virtue*; which account is also confirmed by Xenophon. The story mentioned by Diodorus *of the old volumes of parchment, on which the Persians were obliged by a certain law to write the annals of their country*, was probably invented by Ctesias, that he might give an air of authenticity to his impertinent fables; for such literary impostures were as frequent among the Greeks, as among us, who imitate the Ancients in nothing but their failings. We are far from contending, however, that the ancient Persians, especially those of the *second period*, were entire strangers to the art of composition either in verse or prose; for there never was a nation so rude and unpolished, who

had not a custom *of celebrating the noble acts of their ancestors, and inciting one another by songs and panegyrics to an imitation of their virtue* ; and Strabo, a very different author from Diodorus, asserts, *that the* Persians *used frequently to sing the praises of their ancient Heroes and Demigods, sometimes with a musical instrument, and sometimes with the voice alone* ; but what their language really was, what were their rules of versification, or what was the course of their studies, no mortal can pretend to know with any shadow of exactness.

The Greek Historians can give us no light on this subject ; for neither Themistocles, who spoke the dialect of Persia like a native, though he had spent only one year in learning it, nor even Xenophon, whose intimacy with *the younger Cyrus* could not have been contracted without a knowledge of his language, seem to have read the works of the Persians, or even to have known their characters ; but were perhaps contented to express their sentiments in Persian with ease and fluency. Nor are we much enlightened by the writers after Alexander ; not even by those, who have described the life of that Hero : for Curtius, who compiled his rhetorical History from the Greek authors, seems to have known as little of Persian as of Scythian, though he dresses up a number of speeches for the chiefs of those nations, which certainly were never spoken by them. A few words indeed, are here and there interspersed in these histories, which are still used in the modern idiom of Persia ; but we can no more form an idea of a whole language from a list of broken phrases or detached epithets, than

we can judge of a poem or piece of oratory, from an unconnected line or a single member of a period.

Since the Greeks afford us so little information, nothing remains but to consult the Persians themselves; and the great Traveller Chardin, whom every Orientalist must always mention with reverence, seems to have enquired very diligently into the ancient language of the people, among whom he resided so long, and whose manners he describes with so much copiousness and learning: but he declares, after all his researches, "That the old Persian is a language entirely lost; in "which no books are extant, and of which there are no "rudiments remaining: that the *Guebres*, who are the "remains of the *Parsis*, or *Adorers of Fire*, have an "idiom peculiar to themselves; which is supposed, by "the Persians in general, to be rather a jargon of their "own, than a part of their ancient tongue: that, if "you believe their own account, the Magi, who resided "at Yezd in Carmania, have preserved this language "from father to son, after the dissolution of their Mo-"narchy; but that, for his part, he has found no reason "to give any credit to their story: that they have, in-"deed, some books in strange characters, but he can-"not persuade himself that they are old Persian letters: "especially, since they bear no kind of resemblance to "those on the famous monuments at Persepolis." The authority of this excellent writer is decisive, and puts an end at once to the controversy lately started, concerning the authenticity of the books ascribed to *Zoroaster*, which a French adventurer, who *translated them from*

the translation of a certain Gipsy at Surat, has had the boldness to send abroad as genuine. From this we may reasonably conclude, that the gibberish of those swarthy vagabonds, whom we often see brooding over a miserable fire under the hedges, may as well be taken for *old Egyptian*, and the beggars themselves for the *priests of Isis*, as the jugglers on the coast of India for the disciples of Zoroaster, and their barbarous dialect for the ancient language of Persia. But let the *rosy-cheeked Frenchman*, to give him his own Epithet, rest happy in the contemplation of his personal beauty, and the vast extent of his learning: it is sufficient for us to have exposed his follies, detected his imposture, and retorted his invectives, without insulting a fallen adversary, or attempting, like the Hero in *Dryden's* Ode, *to slay the slain*.

We have no genuine accounts then of the Persian language till the time of the SASSANIAN kings, who flourished *from the opening of third century to the middle of the seventh*; in which period an Academy of Physic was founded at Gandisapor, a City of Khorasan, and, as it gradually declined from its original institution, it became a school of poetry, rhetoric, dialectic, and the abstract sciences. In this excellent seminary the Persian tongue could not fail of being greatly refined, and the rusticity of the old idiom was succeeded by a pure and elegant dialect; which, being constantly spoken at the court of Behárам Gùr in the year 351, acquired the name of *Deri*, or, *Courtly*, to distinguish it from the *Pehlevi*, or, *Language of the Country*.

It must not, however, be imagined, that the use of the ancient dialect was wholly superseded by this more polished idiom ; for several compositions in Pehlevi were extant even after *Mahomed*, which appear to have been written by order of the Sassanian Princes. Anushirvan, surnamed *The Just*, who reigned at the close of *the sixth century*, having heard from some travellers, that the Indian Monarchs had *a collection of moral fables*, which they preserved with great care among their archives, sent his chief Physician Barzuieh into India, with orders to make himself master of the *Sanscrit* language, and not to return without a translation of those fables. These orders were punctually executed ; Barzuieh learned the Indian tongue, and, having at a great expence procured a copy of the book, translated it into the Pehlevian dialect : about an hundred and forty years after, his work was turned from Pehlevi into Arabic, by order of Almansur, second Khalif of the Abbasides ; and this is the volume which we see in every language of Europe, under the name of *Calîla wa Demna*, or, *The fables of Pilpay*. There is a fine copy of the Arabic version in the public library at Oxford ; and if the work of Barzuieh could be found, we should be enabled to recover a considerable part of the old Persian language ; the same, perhaps, which was spoken *in the second period* by Themistocles and Xenophon.

In the reign of Anushirvan, who protected the arts and sciences in his own dominions, *MAHOMED* was born ; who, by the force of his eloquence, and the success of

his arms, established a mighty Empire, and spread his new religion from the wilds of Arabia, to the mountains of Tartary and the banks of the *Ganges*: but, what belongs more particularly to the subject of this discourse, *he polished the language of his country*, and brought it to a degree of purity and elegance, which no Arabian writer since his time has been able to surpass. The battle of Cadessia in the year 656 gave the last blow to the Persian Monarchy; and the whole Empire of *Iran* was soon reduced under the power of the first *Mahomedan* Dynasty, who fixed the seat of their government in *Bagdad*, where the Arabic language was spoken, for many ages, in its utmost perfection: but *the ancient literature of Persia*, which had been promoted by the family of Sassan was expressly discouraged by the immediate successors of Mahomed, for a reason, which it is proper to explain.

At the time when the *Alcoran* was first published in Arabia, a merchant, who had lately returned from a long journey, brought with him some Persian romances, which he interpreted to his countrymen, who were extremely delighted with them, and used to say openly, that the stories of griffons and giants were more amusing to them than the moral lessons of Mahomed: part of a chapter in the Alcoran was immediately written, to stop the progress of these opinions; the merchant was severely reprimanded; his tales were treated as pernicious fables, hateful to God and his prophet; and Omar, from the same motive of policy, determined to destroy all the foreign books which should fall into his hands.

Thus the idle loquacity of an Arabian traveller, by setting his legends in competition with the precepts of a powerful Lawgiver, was the cause of that enthusiasm in the Mahomedans, which induced them to burn the famous library of Alexandria, and the records of the Persian Empire.

One book, however, besides the fables of Pilpay, escaped the fury of these unmerciful zealots: it was a History of Persia in the Pehlevian dialect, extracted from the Sassanian annals, and composed, it is believed, by the command of Anushirvan. Saad, one of Omar's Generals, found this volume, after the victory at Cadessia, and preserved it for himself as a curiosity: it passed afterwards through several hands, and was at length translated into some other languages of Asia.

It was a long time before the native Persians could recover from the shock of this violent revolution; and their language seems to have been very little cultivated under the Khalifs, who gave greater encouragement to the literature of the Arbians: but, when the power of the Abbasides began to decline, and a number of independent Princes arose in the different provinces of their empire, the arts of elegance, and chiefly Poetry, revived in Persia, and there was hardly a Prince, or Governor of a city, who had not several poets and men of letters in his train. The Persian tongue was consequently restored in the tenth century; but it was very different from the Deri or Pehlevi of the Ancients: it was mixed with the words of the Alcoran, and with expressions from the Arabian Poets, whom the Persians considered

as their masters, and affected to imitate in their poetical measures, and the turn of their verses.

That the learned reader may have a just notion of this new idiom, it seems necessary, first to produce a specimen of *pure Arabic*, and, afterwards, of the *purest Persian* that can be found; by which means he will form a more accurate judgment of *the modern Persic*, in which both languages are perfectly incorporated.

The following ode was written by a native of Damascus: it contains a lively description of *an Eastern Banquet;* and most of the couplets are highly elegant in the original. That is; "We have a banquet, into "which sorrow cannot enter, and from which mirth "can never depart. It comprises every species of "Beauty; and he, who seeks the joys of life, cannot "rise beyond it. A sprightly Song gives more plea-"sure to youth than Riches: here the stream of life is "unsullied, and all our cares are dispersed. Here the "mildness of our gentle darling gives ease to our love; "and here the timid dervise becomes an Apostate from "his faith. We have a bower, on which the dew-drops "sparkle; and in which the breeze becomes scented "with the fragrance of musk. You see the various "blossoms, which resemble stars blazing and glittering "in the firmament. Here the wonderful beauties of "the flowers, among which are the narcissus and the "violet, bring the fair objects of my love to my re-"membrance. You would think you saw my beloved "looking mildly on you with her soft, tender, languish-"ing eye: a nymph, in whom every charm and every

" perfection is collected; whose curled locks hang " always dangling, black as the scorpion, or the mace " of ebony (with which the Asiatics strike an ivory " ball in one of their favourite plays), the pomegranate " brings to my mind the blushes of my beloved, when " her cheeks are coloured with a modest resentment. " Our cups are such as our souls desire; they seem to " be filled with the streams of friendship and cheerful-" ness. The goblets and vases of China appear to my " sight, like the stars of heaven shining in the Zodiack."

I might here have selected a more ancient example of Arabic, either from the poets before Mahomed, or from the illustrious Abu Temám, who flourished in the ninth century; but the language has remained unaltered from the earliest antiquity to the present time, and it would not have been easy, without a number of notes, to have made an ancient Ode intelligible in a literal translation.

The oldest Persian poems, which have come to my knowledge, are those of FERDUSI, of which it will not be improper to give a short account, as far as they relate to my present subject.

At the close of the tenth, and beginning of the eleventh centuries, Mahmud reigned in the city of Gazna: he was supreme ruler of Zablestan, and part of Khorasan, and had penetrated very far into India, where by this time the religion and language of the Arabs and Persians had begun to prevail. Several poets were entertained in the palace of this Monarch,

among whom was FERDUSI, a native of Tûs or Meshed. This most learned man, happening to find a copy of the old Persian History abovementioned, read it with eagerness, and found it involved in fables, but bearing the marks of high antiquity: the most ancient part of it, and principally the war of Afrasiab and Khosru, or Cyrus, seemed to afford an excellent subject for an Heroic Poem, which he accordingly began to compose. Some of his episodes and descriptions were shown to the Sultan, who commended them exceedingly, and ordered him to comprise the whole *History of Persia* in a series of *Epic poems.* The poet obeyed; and, after the happiest exertion of his fancy and art for near thirty years, he finished his work, which contained sixty thousand couplets in rhyme, all highly polished, with the spirit of Dryden and the sweetness of Pope. He presented an elegant transcript of his book to Mahmud, who coldly applauded his diligence, and dismissed him. Many months elapsed, and Ferdusi heard no more of his work; he then took occasion to remind the King of it by some little epigrams, which he contrived to let fall in the palace; but, where an Epic poem had failed, what effect could be expected from an Epigram? At length the reward came; which consisted only of as many small pieces of money, as there were couplets in the volume. The high-minded Poet could not brook this insult: he retired to his closet with bitterness in his heart; where he wrote a most noble and animated invective against the Sultan, which he sealed up, and delivered to a Courtier, who, as he

had reason to suspect, was his greatest enemy, assuring him, *that it was a diverting tale*, and requesting him to give it to Mahmud, when any affair of state or bad success in war should make him more uneasy and splenetic than usual. Having thus given vent to his just indignation, he left Gazna in the night, and took refuge in Bagdad, where Khalif protected him frcm the Sultan of Zablestan, who demanded him in a furious and menacing letter.

The work of Ferdusi remains entire, a glorious monument of Eastern genius and learning; which, if ever it should be generally understood in its original language, will contest the merit of invention with Homer himself, whatever be thought of its subject or the arrangement of its incidents. An extract from this poem will exhibit a specimen of the Persian tongue, very little adulterated by a mixture with the Arabic, and, in all probability, approaching nearly to the dialect used in Persia in the time of Mahomed, who admired it for its extreme softness, and was heard to say, that it would be spoken on that account in the gardens of Paradise. That is: "Seest thou yonder plain of various "colours (Pers. red and grey); by which the heart "of a valiant man may be filled with delight? It is "entirely covered with groves and gardens and flow-"ing rivulets; it is a place belonging to the abode of "Heroes. The ground is perfect silk, and the air is "scented with musk: you would say, Is it rose-water "which glides between the banks? The stalk of the "lily bends under the weight of the flower; and the

" whole grove is charmed with the fragrance of the rose-" bush. The pheasant walks gracetully among the " flowers; the dove and nightingale warble from the " branches of the cypress. From the present time to " the latest age, may the edge of those banks resemble " the bowers of Paradise! There you will see, on the " plains and hills, a company of damsels, beautiful as " fairies, sitting cheerfully on every side. There Mani-" zha, daughter of Afrasiab, makes the whole garden " blaze like the Sun. Sitara, his second daughter, sits " exalted like a Queen, encircled by her damsels, radiant " in glory. The lovely maid is an ornament to the " plains; her beauty sullies the rose and the jasmine. " With them are many Turkish girls, all with their " faces veiled; all with their bodies taper as a cypress, " and locks black as musk; all with cheeks full of " roses, with eyes full of sleep; all with lips sweet as " wine, and fragrant as rose-water. If we go near to " that bower, and turn aside for a single day, we may " take several of those lovely nymphs, and bring them " to the noble Cyrus."

This is part of a speech by a young amorous Hero, the Paris of Ferdusi, who had reason to repent of his adventure with the daughter of Afrasiab, for he was made captive by the Turks, and confined in a dismal prison, till he was delivered by the valour of Rostam.

Of these two languages was formed the modern dialect of Persia, which, being spoken in its greatest purity by the natives of Pars or Farsistan, acquired the name of Parsi; though it is even called Deri by Hafez

in the followiug couplet ; that is ; "While the night-"ingale, O Hafez, makes a boast of his eloquence, do "thou lessen the value of his lays by singing thy "Persian (Deri) strains."

Nearly in the same age with Ferdusi, the great Abul Ola, surnamed Alámi from his blindness, published his excellent Odes in Arabic, in which he professedly imitated the poets before Mahomed. This writer had so flourishing a reputation, that several Persians of uncommon genius were ambitious of learning the Art of poetry from so able an instructor : his most illustrious scholars were Feleki and Khakani, who were no less eminent for their Persian compositions, than for their skill in every branch of pure and mixed Mathematics, and particularly in Astronomy ; a striking proof, that a sublime Poet may become a master of any kind of learning which he chooses to profess ; since a fine imagination, a lively wit, an easy and copious style, cannot possibly obstruct the acquisition of any science whatever, but must necessarily assist him in his studies, and shorten his labour. Both these poets were protected by Manucheher, Prince of Shirvan ; but Khakani was always averse to the pleasurable and dissipated life of a Court, so that the Prince was obliged to detain him by force in his palace, and actually confined him for some time in prison, lest he should find some opportunity of escaping.

The works of these authors are not very scarce ; but it seems needless to give any extracts from them, which would swell this discourse to an immoderate

length : it will be sufficient to say, that, in this and the following century, the Persian language became altogether mixed with Arabic ; not that the pure style of the ancients was wholly obsolete, but it was the fashion among the Persians to interweave Arabian phrases and verses into their poems, not by way of quotations, but as material parts of a sentence. Thus in the following distich, "The phantom of her, whose beauty gives brightness to the shades, appeared to me at night : I wondered at the kindness of Fortune, and said, Whence came this prosperity" ?—the first line is pure Arabic in the style of the ancient poets.

This elegant tetrastich is of the same kind : "In this mansion of darkness, how long must I sit expecting my beloved ; one while with my finger on my teeth, one while with my head bent on my knee ? Come, O fortunate cup-bearer, bring me the tidings of joy : who knows but my days may again be prosperous, as they were before" ? Where the last line is taken from an Ode in the Hamasa of Abu Temám, which begins, "We pardoned the sons of Dhohal, and said, The tribe are our brothers."

At the opening of the twelfth century lived Anveri, a native of Abiurd in Khorasan, whose adventures deserve to be related, as they will show in what high esteem the polite arts were held in Asia, at the time when learning first began to dawn in Europe. Anveri, when he was very young, was sitting at the gate of his college, when a man richly dressed rode by him on a fine Arabian horse, with a numerous train of attend-

ants; upon his asking who it was, he was told, that it was a Poet belonging to the Court. When Anveri reflected on the honours conferred upon Poetry, for which art he had a very early bent, he applied himself to it more ardently than ever, and, having finished a poem, presented it to the Sultan. This was a prince of the Seljukian dynasty, named Sanjar, a great admirer of the fine arts: he approved the work of Anveri, whom he invited to his palace, and raised him even to the first honours of the state. He found many other poets at court, among whom were Selman, Zehir, and Reshídi, all men of wit and genius, but each eminent in a different way; the first for the delicacy of his Lyric verses, the second, for the moral tendency of his poems, and the third, for the chastity of his compositions; a virtue, which his predecessors and contemporaries were too apt to neglect.

But of all the cities in the Persian Empire, none has given birth to more excellent poets than Shiraz; which Baron Revizki justly calls "the Athens of Persia." SADI, a native of this city, flourished in the thirteenth century, when the Atabegs of Parsistan encouraged men of learning in their principality: his life was almost wholly spent in travel; but no man, who enjoyed the greatest leisure, ever left behind him more valuable fruits of his genius and industry. A fine manuscript, about two hundred years old, was lately put into my hands, containing a complete collection of his works; among which are several pieces, both in verse and prose, which have never been mentioned by the Scholars of Europe. The follow-

ing extract from his Gulistan, or *Bed of Roses*, will show how the Persian and Arabic languages were mixed together in his age: that is; "My companion oft re-
"proaches me for my love of Leila. Will he never
"behold her charms, that my excuse may be accepted?
"Would to heaven, that they, who blame me for my
"passion, could see thy face, O thou ravisher of hearts!
"that, at the sight of thee, they might be confounded,
"and inadvertently cut their heads instead of the fruit,
"which they hold. Thou hast no compassion for my
"disorder: my companion should be afflicted with the
"same malady, that I might sit all day repeating my
"tale to him; for two pieces of wood burn together
"with a brighter flame. The song of the turtle dove
"passes not unobserved by my ear; and if the dove
"could hear my strain, she would join her complaints
"with mine. O my friends, say to them, who are free
"from love, Ah, we wish you knew, what passes in the
"heart of a lover! The pain of illness affects not them,
"who are in health: I will not disclose my grief but
"to those, who have tasted the same affliction. It
"were fruitless to talk of an hornet to them, who never
"felt its sting. While thy mind is not affected like
"mine, the relation of my sorrow seems only an idle
"tale. Compare not my anguish to the cares of ano-
"ther man; he only holds the salt in his hand, but it
"is I, who bear the wound in my body."

The same city had the honour of producing, in the fourteenth century, the most elegant Lyric Poet of Asia, Shemseddín, surnamed HAFEZ; on whose life

and productions it is the less necessary to expatiate, because the Baron before-mentioned has exhausted the subject in his specimen of Persian Poetry. It will be fully sufficient, therefore, to transcribe two of his Gazals or Anacreontic Odes; the first of which was chosen, on account of the Arabic verses interwoven in it, and the second, for its exquisite beauty, which makes it a genuine example of the true Shirazian dialect.

A PERSIAN SONG.

"The dawn advances veiled with roses. Bring the "morning draught, my friends, the morning draught! "The dew-drops trickle over the cheek of the tulip. "Bring the wine, my dear companions, bring the wine! "A gale of paradise breathes from the garden: drink "then incessantly the pure wine. The rose spreads her "emerald throne in the bower. Reach the liquor, that "sparkles like a flaming ruby. Are they still shut up "in the banquet-house? Open, O thou keeper of the "gate. It is strange, at such a season, that the door of "the tavern should be locked. Oh, hasten! O thou, "who art in love, drink wine with eagerness; and you, "who are endued with wisdom, offer your vows to "Heaven. Imitate Hafez, and drink kisses, sweet as "wine from the cheek of a damsel, fair as a nymph of "paradise."

"Rise, boy; for the cup of the tulip is full of wine. "When will this strictness end? how long will these "scruples last? No more of this pride and disdain;

"for time has seen the crown of Cæsar humbled, and "the diadem of Cyrus bent to the ground. Oh! be "wise: for the bird of the morning is intoxicated with "love. Oh, awake! for the sleep of eternity is just "before you. How gracefully thou movest, O sweet "branch of a vernal plant! May the cold wind of De-"cember never nip thy buds! There is no reliance on "the favours of Fortune or her deceitful smiles. Oh! "wo to him, who thinks himself secure from her trea-"chery. To-morrow, perhaps, the stream of Cuther, "and the girls of paradise will be prepared for us; but "to-day also let us enjoy a damsel bright as the moon, "and quaff the wine from the full cup. The Zephyr "(Saba) reminds us of our youth (Sabi); bring us "the wine, boy, which may refresh our souls, and dispel "our sorrow.

"Admire not the splendour and dignity of the rose; "for the wind will soon scatter all her leaves, and "spread them beneath our feet. Bring a larger cup to "the memory of Hatem Tai; that we may fold up "(Tai) the gloomy volume of those, who want genero-"sity. This wine, which gives a lively tint to the "Argavan (a purple flower), communicates its sweet "nature from my beloved's cheek to her heart. Attend: "for the musicians of the bower have begun their con-"cert, joining the notes of the lute and harp to the "melody of the dulcimer and flute. Bring thy Sofa "into the garden, for, like active attendants, the cypress "stands before us, and the green reed has tucked up "his girdle. O Hafez, the fame of thy sweet alluring

" sorcery has reached from the extremity of Reï and " Rûm, to the limits of China and Egypt."

There is nothing, which affords a stronger proof of the excellence of the Persian tongue, than, that it remained uncorrupted after the irruption of the Tartars, who, at different times, and under various leaders, made themselves masters of Persia; for the Tartarian princes, and chiefly Tamerlane, who was a patron of Hafez, were so far from discouraging polite letters, like the Goths and Huns, that they adopted even the language and religion of the conquered country, and promoted the fine arts with a boundless munificence: and one of them, who founded the Mogul Empire in Hindustan, introduced the Persian literature into his dominions, where it flourishes to this day; and all the letters from the Indian governors are written in the language (I do not say, in the style) of Sadi. The Turks themselves improved their harsh dialect by mixing it with the Persian; and Mahomed II. who took Constantinople in the middle of the fifteenth Century, was a protector of the Persian poets: among these was Noureddîn Jami, whose poem on the loves of Joseph and Zelikha is one of the finest compositions I ever read. The following description will serve as a specimen of his elegant style:

" In the morning, when the raven of night had " flown away, the bird of dawn began to sing: the nightingales warbled their enchanting notes, and rent the thin veils of the rose-bud and the rose: the jasmine " stood bathed in dew, and the violet also sprinkled his

"fragrant locks. At this time Zelikha was sunk in "pleasing slumber; her heart was turned towards the "altar of her sacred vision. It was not sleep; it was "rather a confused idea: it was a kind of phrenzy "caused by her nightly melancholy. Her damsels "touched her feet with their faces; her maidens ap-"proached, and kissed her hand. Then she removed "the veil from her cheek, like a tulip besprinkled with "dew; she opened her eyes, yet dim with sleep. From "the border of her mantle the sun and moon arose; "she raised her head from the couch, and looked around "on every side."

This poem contains about four thousand couplets, and deserves to be translated into every European language: though I shall have neither time nor inclination to translate it myself, yet I may perhaps be induced, some years hence, to present the Original to the learned world, which any man, who has the advantage of greater leisure, may take the pains to interpret.

In the same Century with Jami, flourished a poet named CATEBI, who was highly honoured at the court of Mirza Ibrahim, one of Tamerlane's descendants. Mr. d' Herbelot tells a very pleasing story of this writer, which deserves a place in this essay: though, in order to understand it, we must remember, that the Persians frequently end their couplets with the same word, which is often continued through a long poem; but in that case, the rhyme falls upon the preceding syllable. "Catebi, says he, having composed an Elegy, each verse "of which ended with the word, *Gul*, a rose, or any

" flower, repeated it to the prince Ibrahim, his Patron ; " who, being extremely delighted with it, could not " forbear interrupting him, by saying, From what bower " did this tuneful nightingale (meaning the poet) take " its flight ? that is, without a metophor, In what city " were you born ? to which Catebi, without hesitation, " replied in a couplet of the same measure with the " poem, and with the same rhyme, as if he had only " continued to read his Elegy :
" that is, Like Attár, I came from the rose-garden of " Nishapor ; but I am only the thorn of that garden, " and Attàr was its most beautiful flower."

This distich, though delivered extempore, is at least equal to any of the rest in spirit and elegance. The poem consists of about thirty-five couplets, the first of which is the following :
that is ; "Again the rose advances towards the bower with an hundred leaves ; like the narcissus, it is a charming object to every discerning eye."

In the sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries, under the family of Sefi, the Persian language began to lose its ancient purity, and even to borrow some of its terms from the Turkish, which was commonly spoken at Court. As to the modern dialect, no specimen of it needs be produced, fince the Life of Nader Shah, which was written in Persian about a century ago, and translated into French by Sir William Jones, may be consulted in the original by the learned reader.

AN

ESSAY

ON THE

POETRY OF THE EASTERN NATIONS.

ARABIA, I mean that part of it, which we call the Happy, and which the Asiatics know by the name of Yemen, seems to be the only country in the world, in which we can properly lay the scene of pastoral poetry; because no nation at this day can vie with the Arabians in the delightfulness of their climate, and the simplicity of their manners. There is a valley, indeed, to the north of Indostan, called Cashmir, which, according to an account written by a native of it, is a perfect garden, exceedingly fruitful, and watered by a thousand rivulets: but when its inhabitants were subdued by the stratagem of a Mogul prince, they lost their happiness with their liberty, and Arabia retained its old title without any rival to dispute it. These are not the fancies of a poet: the beauties of Yemen are proved by the concurrent testimony of all travellers, by the descriptions of it in all the writings of Asia, and by the nature and situation of the country itself, which lies between the eleventh and fifteenth degrees of northern latitude,

under a serene sky, and exposed to the most favourable influence of the sun; it is enclosed on one side by vast rocks and deserts, and defended on the other by a tempestuous sea, so that it seems to have been designed by Providence for the most secure, as well as the most beautiful, region of the East.*

Its principal cities are Sanaa, usually considered as its metropolis; Zebîd, a commercial town, that lies in a large plain near the sea of Omman; and Aden, surrounded with pleasant gardens and woods, which is situated eleven degrees from the Equator, and seventy-six from the Fortunate Islands, or Canaries, where the geographers of Asia fix their first meridian. It is observable that Aden, in the Eastern dialects, is precisely the same word with Eden, which we apply to the garden of paradise: it has two senses, according to a slight difference in its pronunciation; its first meaning is *a settled abode*, its second, delight, softness, or tranquillity: the word Eden had, probably, one of these senses in the sacred text, though we use it as a proper name. We may also observe in this place that Yemen itself takes its name from a word, which signifies *verdure*, and

* I am at a loss to conceive, what induced the illustrious Prince Cantemir to contend, that Yemen is properly a part of India; for, not to mention Ptolemy, and the other ancients, who considered it as a province of Arabia, nor to insist on the language of the country, which is pure Arabic, it is described by the Asiatics themselves as a large division of that peninsula which they call Jezeiratul Arab; and there is no more reason for annexing it to India, because the sea, which washes one side of it, is looked upon by some writers as belonging to the great Indian ocean, than there would be for annexing it to Persia, because it is bounded on another side by the Persian gulf.

felicity; for in those sultry climates, the freshness of the shade, and the coolness of water, are ideas almost inseparable from that of happiness; and this may be a reason why most of the Oriental nations agree in a tradition concerning a delightful spot, where the first inhabitants of the earth were placed before their fall. The ancients, who gave the name of Eudaimon, or *Happy*, to this country, either meaned to translate the word Yemen, or, more probably, only alluded to the valuable spice-trees, and balsamic plants, that grow in it, and, without speaking poetically, give a real perfume to the air*: now it is certain that all poetry receives a very considerable ornament from the beauty of natural images; as the roses of Sharon, the verdure of Carmel, the vines of Engaddi, and the dew of Hermon, are the sources of many pleasing metaphors and comparisons in the sacred poetry: thus the odours of Yemen, the musk of Hadramut, and the pearls of Omman, supply the Arabian poets with a great variety of allusions; and, if the remark of Hermogenes be just, that whatever is *delightful to the senses* produces the Beautiful when it is described, where can we find so much beauty as in the Eastern poems, which turn chiefly upon the loveliest objects in nature?

To pursue this topic yet farther: it is an observation of Demetrius of Phalera, in his elegant treatise

* The writer of an old history of the Turkish Empire says, "The air "of Egypt sometimes in summer is like any sweet perfume, and almost "suffocates the spirits, caused by the wind that brings the odours of the "Arabian spices."

upon style, that it is not easy to write on agreeable subjects in a disagreeable manner, and that beautiful expressions naturally rise with beautiful images; for which reason, says he, nothing can be more pleasing than Sappho's poetry, which contains the description of gardens, and banquets, flowers and fruits, fountains and meadows, nightingales and turtle-doves, loves and graces: thus, when she speaks of a stream softly murmuring among the branches, and the Zephyrs playing through the leaves, with a sound, that brings on a quiet slumber, her lines flow without labour as smoothly as the rivulet she describes, I may have altered the words of Demetrius, as I quote them by memory, but this is the general sense of his remark, which, if it be not rather specious than just, must induce us to think, that the poets of the East may vie with those of Europe in *the graces of their diction*, as well as in the liveliness of their images: but we must not believe that the Arabian poetry can please only by its descriptions of beauty; since the gloomy and terrible objects, which produce the sublime, when they are aptly described, are no where more common than in the Desert and Stony Arabia's; and, indeed, we see nothing so frequently painted by the poets of those countries, as wolves and lions, precipices and forests, rocks and wildernesses.

If we allow the natural objects, with which the Arabs are perpetually conversant, to be sublime, and beautiful, our next step must be, to confess that their comparisons, metaphors, and allegories are so likewise; for an allegory is a string of metaphors, a metaphor is

a short simile, and the finest similies are drawn from natural objects. It is true that many of the Eastern figures are common to other nations, but some of them receive a propriety from the manners of the Arabians, who dwell in the plains and woods, which would be lost, if they came from the inhabitants of cities : thus *the dew of liberality*, and the *odour of reputation*, are metaphors used by most people ; but they are wonderfully proper in the mouths of those, who have so much need of being refreshed by the dews, and who gratify their sense of smelling with the sweetest odours in the world. Again ; it is very usual in all countries, to make frequent allusions to the brightness of the celestial luminaries, which give their light to all ; but the metaphors taken from them have an additional beauty, if we consider them as made by a nation, who pass most of their nights in the open air, or in tents, and consequently see the moon and stars in their greatest splendour. This way of considering their poetical figures will give many of them a grace, which they would not have in our languages : so, when they compare the foreheads ot their mistresses to the morning, their locks to the night, their faces to the sun, to the moon, or the blossoms of jasmine, their cheeks to roses or ripe fruit, their teeth to pearls, hail-stones, and snow-drops, their eyes to the flowers of the narcissus, their curled hair to black scorpions, and to hyacinths, their lips to rubies or wine, the form of their breasts to pomegranates, and the colour of them to snow, their shape to that of a pine-tree, and their stature to that of a

cypress, a palm-tree, or a javelin, &c. these comparisons, many of which would seem forced in English idioms, have undoubtedly a great delicacy in theirs, and affect their minds in a peculiar manner: yet upon the whole their similies are very just and striking, as that of the blue eyes of a fine woman, bathed in tears, to violets dropping with dew, and that of a warrior, advancing at the head of his army, to an eagle sailing through the air, and piercing the clouds with his wings.

These are not the only advantages, which the natives of Arabia enjoy above the inhabitants of most other countries: they preserve to this day the manners and customs of their ancestors, who, by their own account, were settled in the province of Yemen above three thousand years ago; they have never been wholly subdued by any nation; and though the admiral of Selim the First made a descent on their coast, and exacted a tribute from the people of Aden, yet the Arabians only keep up a show of allegiance to the Sultan, and act, on every important occasion, in open defiance of his power, relying on the swiftness of their horses, and the vast extent of their forests, in which an invading enemy must soon perish: but here I must be understood to speak of those Arabians, who, like the old Nomades, dwell constantly in their tents, and remove from place to place according to the seasons; for the inhabitants of the cities, who traffic with the merchants of Europe in spices, perfumes, and coffee, must have lost a great deal of their ancient simplicity: the others have, certainly, retained it; and, except when their tribes are

engaged in war, spend their days in watching their flocks and camels, or in repeating their native songs, which they pour out almost extempore, professing a contempt for the stately pillars, and solemn buildings of the cities, compared with the natural charms of the country, and the coolness of their tents : thus they pass their lives in the highest pleasure, of which they have any conception, in the contemplation of the most delightful objects, and in the enjoyment of perpetual spring ; for we may apply to part of Arabia that elegant couplet of Waller in his poem of the *Summer-island*.

> The gentle spring, that but salutes us here,
> Inhabits there, and courts them all the year.

Yet the heat of the sun, which must be very intense in a climate so near the Line, is tempered by the shade of the trees, that overhang the valleys, and by a number of fresh streams, that flow down the mountains. Hence it is, that almost all their notions of felicity are taken from freshness and verdure : it is a maxim among them that the three most charming objects in nature are, a green meadow, a clear rivulet, and a beautiful woman, and that the view of these objects at the same time affords the greatest delight imaginable. Mahomed was so well acquainted with the maxim of his country-men, that he described the pleasures of heaven to them, under the allegory of cool fountaints, green bowers, and black-eyed girls, as the word Houri literally signifies in Arabic ; and in the chapter of the Morning, towards

the end of his Alcoran, he mentions a garden, called Irem, which is no less celebrated by the Asiatic poets than that of the Hesperides by the Greeks: it was planted, as the commentators say, by a king, named Shedad, and was once seen by an Arabian, who wandered very far into the deserts in search of a lost camel: it was, probably, a name invented by the imposter, as a type of a future state of happiness. Now it is certain that the genius of every nation is not a little affected by their climate; for, whether it be that the immoderate heat disposes the Eastern people to a life of indolence, which gives them full leisure to cultivate their talents, or whether the sun has a real influence on the imagination (as one would suppose that the Ancients believed, by their making Apollo the god of poetry); whatever be the cause, it has always been remarked, that the Asiatics excel the inhabitants of colder regions in the liveliness of their fancy, and the richness of their invention,

To carry this subject one step farther: as the Arabians are such admirers of beauty, and as they enjoy such ease and leisure, they must naturally be susceptible of that passion, which is the true spring and source of agreeable poetry; and we find, indeed, that love has a greater share in their poems than any other passion: it seems to be always uppermost in their minds, and there is hardly an elegy, a panegyric, or even a satire, in their language, which does not begin with the complaints of an unfortunate, or the exultations of a successful, lover. It sometimes happens,

that the young men of one tribe are in love with the damsels of another ; and, as the tents are frequently removed on a sudden, the lovers are often separated in the progress of the courtship : hence almost all the Arabic poems open in this manner ; the author bewails the sudden departure of his mistress, Hinda, Maia, Zeineb, or Azza, and describes her beauty, comparing her to a wanton fawn, that plays among the aromatic shrubs ; his friends endeavour to comfort him, but he refuses consolation ; he declares his resolution of visiting his beloved, though the way to her tribe lie through a dreadful wilderness, or even through a den of lions ; here he commonly gives a description of the horse or camel, upon which he designs to go, and thence passes, by an easy transition, to the principal subject of his poem, whether it be the praise of his own tribe, or a satire on the timidity of his friends, who refuse to attend him in his expedition ; though very frequently the piece turns wholly upon love. But it is not sufficient that a nation have a genius for poetry, unless they have the advantage of a rich and beautiful language, that their expressions may be worthy of their sentiments ; the Arabians have this advantage also in a high degree : their language is expressive, strong, sonorous, and the most copious, perhaps, in the world ; for, as almost every tribe had many words appropriated to itself, the poets, for the convenience of their measure, or sometimes for their singular beauty, made use of them all, and, as the poems became popular, these words were by degrees incorporated with the whole language, like a number of

little streams, which meet together in one channel, and, forming a most plentiful river, flow rapidly into the sea.

If this way of arguing *à priori* be admitted in the present case (and no single man has a right to infer the merit of the Eastern poetry from the poems themselves, because no single man has a privilege of judging for all the rest), if the foregoing argument have any weight, we must conclude that the Arabians, being perpetually conversant with the most beautiful objects, spending a calm and agreeable life in a fine climate, being extremely addicted to the softer passions, and having the advantage of a language singularly adapted to poetry, must be naturally excellent poets, provided that their *manners* and *customs* be favourable to the cultivation of that art; and that they are highly so, it will not be difficult to prove.

The fondness of the Arabians for poetry, and the respect which they show to poets, would be scarce belived, if we were not assured of it by writers of great authority: the principal occasions of rejoicing among them, were formerly, and, very probably, are to this day, the birth of a boy, the foaling of a mare, the arrival of a guest, and the rise of a poet in their tribe: when a young Arabian has composed a good poem, all the neighbours pay their compliments to his family, and congratulate them upon having a relation capable of recording their actions, and of recommending their virtues to prosterity. At the beginning of the seventh century, the Arabic language was brought to a high degree of perfection by a sort of poetical Academy, that

used to assemble at stated times, in a place called Ocadh, where every poet produced his best composition, and was sure to meet with the applause that it deserved: the most excellent of these poems were transcribed in characters of gold upon Egyptian paper, and hung up in the temple, whence they were named Modhahebat, or Golden, and Moallakat, or Suspended: the poems of this sort were called Casseida's or eclogues'* seven of which are preserved in our libraries, and are considered as the finest that were written before the time of Mahomed. The fourth of them, composed by Lebìd, is purely pastoral, and extremely like the *Alexis* of Virgil, but far more beautiful, because it is more agreeable to nature: the poet begins with praising the charms of the fair *Novara* (a word, which in Arabic signifies *a timorous fawn)* but inveighs against her unkindness; he then interweaves a description of his young camel, which he compares for its swiftness to a stag pursued by the hounds; and takes occasion afterwards to mention his own riches, accomplishments, liberality, and valour, his noble birth, and the glory of his tribe: the diction of this poem is easy and simple, yet elegant, the numbers flowing and musical, and the sentiments wonderfully natural; as the learned reader will see by the

* These seven poems, clearly transcribed with explanatory notes, are among Pocock's manuscripts at Oxford, No. 164: the names of the seven poets are Amralkeis, Tarafa, Zoheir, Lebid, Antara, Amru, and Hareth. In the same collection, No. 174, there is a manuscript, containing above forty other poems, which had the honour of being suspended in the temple at Mecca: this volume is an inestimable treasure of ancient Arabic literature.

following passage, which I shall attempt to imitate in verse, that the merit of the poet may not be wholly lost in a verbal translation :

But ah ! thou know'st not in what youthful play
Our nights, beguil'd with pleasure, swam away ;
Gay songs, and cheerful tales, deceiv'd the time,
And circling goblets made a tuneful chime ;
Sweet was the draught, and sweet the blooming maid,
Who touch'd her lyre beneath the fragrant shade ;
We sip'd till morning purpled ev'ry plain ;
The damsels slumber'd, but we sip'd again :
The waking birds, that sung on ev'ry tree
Their early notes, were not so blithe as we .

The Mahomedan writers tell a story of this poet, which deserves to be mentioned here : it was a custom, it seems, among the old Arabians, for the most eminent versifiers to hang up some chosen couplets on the gate of the temple, as a public challenge to their brethren, who strove to answer them before the next meeting at Ocadh, at which time the whole assembly used to determine the merit of them all, and gave some mark of distinction to the author of the finest verses. Now Lebíd, who, we are told, had been a violent opposer of Mahomed, fixed a poem on the gate, beginning with the following distich, in which he apparently meaned to reflect upon the new religion : "Are not all things vain, which came not from God ? and will not all honours decay, but those, which He confers ?" These lines appeared so sublime, that none of the poets ventured to answer them ; till Mahomed, who was himself a poet, having composed a new chapter of his Alcoran (the

second, I think), placed the opening of it by the side of Lebíd's poem, who no sooner read it, than he declared it to be something divine, confessed his own inferiority, tore his verses from the gate, and embraced the religion of his rival; to whom he was afterwards extremely useful in replying to the satires of Amralkeis, who was continually attacking the doctrine of Mahomed: the Asiatics add, that their lawgiver acknowledged some time after, that no heathen poet had ever produced a nobler distich than that of Lebíd just quoted.

There are a few other collections of ancient Arabic poetry; but the most famous of them is called Hamása, and contains a number of *epigrams*, *odes*, and *elegies*, composed on various occasions: it was compiled by *Abu Temam*, who was an excellent poet himself, and used to say, that fine sentiments delivered in prose were like gems scattered at random, but that, when they were confined in a poetical measure, they resembled bracelets and strings of pearls. When the religion and language of Mahomed were spread over the greater part of Asia, and the maritime countries of Africa, it became a fashion for the poets of Persia, Syria, Egypt, Mauritania, and even of Tartary, to write in Arabic; and the most beautiful verses in that idiom, composed by the brightest genius's of those nations, are to be seen in a large miscellany, entitled Yateima; though many of their works are transcribed separately: it will be needless to say much on the poetry of the Syrians, Tartarians, and Africans, since most of the arguments, before used in favour of the Arabs, have equal weight with respect

to the other Mahomedans, who have done little more than imitate their style, and adopt their expressions; for which reason also I shall dwell the shorter time on the genius and manners of the Persians, Turks and Indians.

The great empire, which we call PERSIA, is known by the name of Iran; since the word Persia belongs only to a particular province, the ancient Persis, and is very improperly applied by us to the whole kingdom: but, in compliance with the custom of our geographers, I shall give the name of Persia to that celebrated country, which lies on one side between the Caspian and Indian seas, and extends on the other from the mountains of Candahar, or Paropamisus, to the confluence of the rivers Cyrus and Araxes, containing about twenty degrees from south to north, and rather more from east to west.

In so vast a tract of land there must needs be a great variety of climates: the southern provinces are no less unhealthy and sultry, than those of the north are rude and unpleasant; but in the interior parts of the empire the air is mild and temperate, and, from the beginning of May to September, there is scarce a cloud to be seen in the sky: the remarkable calmness of the summer nights, and the wonderful splendour of the moon and stars in that country, often tempt the *Persians* to sleep on the tops of their houses, which are generally flat, where they cannot but observe the figures of the constellations, and the various appearances of the heavens; and this may in some measure account

for the perpetual allusions of their poets, and rhetoricians, to the beauty of the heavenly bodies. We are apt to censure the oriental style for being so full of metaphors taken from the sun and moon: this is ascribed by some to the bad taste of the Asiatics; the works of the Persians, says M. de Voltaire, are like the titles of their kings, in which the sun and moon are often introduced: but they do not reflect, that every nation has a set of images, and expressions, peculiar to itself, which arise from the difference of its climate, manners, and history. There seems to be another reason for the frequent allusions of the Persians to the sun, which may, perhaps, be traced from the old language and popular religion of their country: thus Mihridâd, or Mithridates, signifies *the gift of the sun*, and answers to the Theodorus and Diodati of other nations. As to the titles of the Eastern monarchs, which seem, indeed, very extravagant to our ears, they are merely formal, and no less void of meaning than those of European princes, in which serenity and highness are often attributed to the most gloomy, and low-minded of men.

The midland provinces of Persia abound in fruits and flowers of almost every kind, and, with proper culture, might be made the garden of Asia: they are not watered, indeed, by any considerable river, since the Tigris and Euphrates, the Cyrus and Araxes, the Oxus, and the five branches of the Indus, are at the farthest limits of the kingdom; but the natives, who have a turn for agriculture, supply that defect by artificial canals, which sufficiently temper the dryness of

the soil; but in saying they supply that defect, I am falling into a common error, and representing the country, not as it is at present, but as it was a century ago; for a long series of civil wars and massacres have now destroyed the chief beauties of Persia, by stripping it of its most industrious inhabitants.

The same difference of climate, that affects the air and soil of this extensive country, gives a variety also to the persons and temper of its natives; in some provinces they have dark complexions, and harsh features; in others they are exquisitely fair, and well made; in some others, nervous and robust: but the general character of the nation is that softness, and love of pleasure, that indolence, and effeminacy, which have made them an easy prey to all the western and northern swarms, that have from time to time invaded them. Yet they are not wholly void of martial spirit; and, if they are not naturally brave, they are at least extremely docile, and might, with proper discipline, be made excellent soldiers but the greater part of them, in the short intervals of peace that they happen to enjoy, constantly sink into a state of inactivity, and pass their lives in a pleasurable, yet studious, retirement; and this may be one reason, why Persia has produced more writers of every kind, and chiefly poets, than all Europe together, since their way of life gives them leisure to pursue those arts, which cannot be cultivated to advantage, without the greatest calmness and serenity of mind. There is a manuscript at Oxford, containing the lives of an hundred and thirty-five of the finest Persian poets, most

of whom left very ample collections of their poems behind them : but the versifiers, and moderate poets, if Horace will allow any such men to exist, are without number in Persia.

This delicacy of their lives and sentiments has insensibly affected their language, and rendered it the softest, as it is one of the richest, in the world, it is not possible to convince the reader of this truth, by quoting a passage from a Persian poet in European characters ; since the stweetness of sound cannot be determined by the fight, and many words, which are soft and musical in the mouth of a Persian, may appear harsh to our eyes, with a number of consonants and gutturals : it may not, however, be absurd to set down in this place, an Ode of the poet Hafez, which, if it be not sufficient to prove the delicacy of his language, will at least show the liveliness of his poetry.

Ai bad nesimi yardari,
Zan nefhei mushebar dari :
Zinhar mecun diraz-desti !
Ba turrei o che câr dari ?
Ai gul, to cujà wa ruyi zeibash.
O taza, wa to kharbâr dari.
Nerkes, to cujâ wa cheshmi mestesh ?
O ferkhosh, wa to khumar dari.
Ai seru, to ba kaddi bulendesh,
Der bagh che iytebâr dari ?
Ai akl, to ba wujûdi ishkesh
Der dest che ikhtiyâr dari ?
Rihan, to cujâ wa khatti sebzesh ?
O mushc, wa to ghubâr dari.
Ruzi bures bewasli Hafiz,
Gher takati yntizâr dari.

That is, word for word, "O sweet gale, thou bearest the fragrant scent of my beloved; then it is that thou hast this musky odour. Beware! do not steal: what hast thou to do with her tresses? O rose, what art thou, to be compared with her bright face? She is fresh, and thou art rough with thorns. O narcissus, what art thou in comparison of her languishing eye? Her eye is only sleepy, but thou art sick and faint. O pine, compared with her graceful stature, what honour hast thou in the garden? O wisdom, what wouldst thou choose, if to choose were in thy power, in preference to her love? O sweet basil, what art thou, to be compared with her fresh cheeks? They are perfect musk, but thou art soon withered. Come, my beloved, and charm Hafez with thy presence, if thou canst but stay with him for a single day. This little song is not unlike a sonnet ascribed to Shakespeare, which deserves to be cited here, as a proof that the Eastern imagery is not so different from the European as we are apt to imagine.

The forward violet thus did I chide:
" Sweet thief! whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
" If not from my love's breath? The purple pride,
" Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells,
" In my love's veins thou hast to grossly dyed."
The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair;
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair;
A third, nor red, nor white had stol'n of both,
And to his robb'ry had annex'd thy breath;
But for his theft, in pride of all his growth,
A vengeful canker eat him up to death.

More flow'rs I noted, yet I none could see,
But scent or colour it had stol'n from thee.

Shakespeare's Poems, p. 207

The Persian style is said to be ridiculously bombast, and this fault is imputed to the slavish spirit of the nation, which is ever apt to magnify the objects that are placed above it : there are bad writers, to be sure, in every country, and as many in Asia as elsewhere ; but if we take the pains to learn the Persian language, we shall find that those authors, who are generally esteemed in Persia, are neither slavish in their sentiments, nor ridiculous in their expressions : of which the following passage in a moral work of Sadi, entitled Bostan, or, *The Garden*, will be a sufficient proof. "I have heard that king Nushirvan, just before his death, spoke thus to his son Hormuz : Be a guardian, my son, to the poor and helpless ; and be not confined in the chains of thy own indolence. No one can be at ease in thy dominion, while thou seekest only thy private rest, and sayest, It is enough. A wise man will not approve the shepherd, who sleeps, while the wolf is in the fold. Go, my son, protect thy weak and indigent people ; since through them is a king raised to the diadem. The people are the root, and the king is the tree that grows from it ; and the tree, O my son, derives its strength from the root."

Are these mean sentiments, delivered in pompous language ? Are they not rather worthy of our most spirited writers ? And do they not convey a fine lesson for a young king ? Yet Sadi's poems are highly esteem-

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ed at Constantinople, and at Ispahan; though, a century or two ago, they would have been suppressed in Europe, for spreading with too strong a glare the light of liberty and reason.

As to the great Epic poem of Ferdusi, which was composed in the tenth century, it would require a very long treatise, to explain all its beauties with a minute exactness. The whole collection of that poet's works is called Shahnâma, and contains the history of Persia, from the earliest times to the invasion of the Arabs, in a series of very noble poems; the longest and most regular of which is an heroic poem of one great and interesting action, namely, the delivery of Persia by Cyrus from the oppressions of Afrasiab, king of the Transoxan Tartary, who being assisted by the emperors of India and China, together with all the demons, giants, and enchanters of Asia, had carried his conquests very far, and become exceedingly formidable to the Persians. This poem is longer than the Iliad; the characters in it are various and striking; the figures bold and animated; and the diction every where sonorous, yet noble; polished, yet full of fire. A great profusion of learning has been thrown away by some critics, in comparing Homer with the heroic poets, who have succeeded him; but it requires very little judgment to see, that no succeeding poet whatever can with any propriety be compared with Homer: that great father of the Grecian poetry and literature, had a genius too fruitful and comprehensive to let any of the striking parts of nature escape his observation; and the

poets, who have followed him, have done little more than transcribe his images, and give a new dress to his thoughts. Whatever elegance and refinements, therefore, may have been introduced into the works of the moderns, the spirit and invention of Homer have ever continued without a rival: for which reasons I am far from pretending to assert that the poet of Persia is equal to that of Greece; but there is certainly a very great resemblance between the works of those extraordinary men: both drew their images from nature herself, without catching them only by reflection, and painting, in the manner of the modern poets, *the likeness of a likeness;* and both possessed, in an eminent degree, that rich and creative invention, which is the very soul of poetry.

As the Persians borrowed their poetical measures, and the forms of their poems from the Arabians, so the TURKS, when they had carried their arms into Mesopotamia and Assyria, took their numbers and their taste for poetry from the Persians;

> Grœcia capta ferum victorem cepit, et artes
> Intulit agresti Latio.

In the same manner as the Greek compositions were the models of all the Roman writers, so were those of Persia imitated by the Turks, who considerably polished and enriched their language, naturally barren, by the number of simple and compound words, which they adopted from the Persian and Arabic. Lady Wortley Montague very justly observes, that we want those compound words, which are very frequent and strong in

the Turkish language; but her interpreters led her into a mistake in explaining one of them, which she translates *stag—eyed*, and thinks a very lively image of the fire and indifference in the eyes ot the royal bride: now it never entered into the mind of an Asiatic to compare his mistress's eyes to those of a stag, or to give an image of their fire and indifference; the Turks mean to express that fullness, and, at the same time, that soft and languishing lustre, which is peculiar to the eyes of their beautiful women, and which by no means resembles the unpleasing wildness in those of a stag. The original epithet, I suppose, was Ahû cheshm, or, with the eyes of a young fawn: now I take the Ahû to be the same animal with the Gazâl of the Arabians, and the Zabi of the Hebrews, to which their poets allude in almost every page. I have seen one of these animals; it is a kind of antelope, exquisitely beautiful, with eyes uncommonly black and large. This is the same sort of roe, to which Solomon alludes in this delicate simile: *Thy two breasts are like two young roes, that are twins, which play among the lilies.*

A very polite scholar, who has lately translated sixteen Odes of Hafiz, with learned illustrations, blames the Turkish poets for copying the Persians too servilely: but, surely, they are not more blameable than Horace, who not only imitated the measures and expressions of the Greeks, but even translated, almost word for word, the brightest passages of Alcœus, Anacreon, and others; he took less from Pindar than from the rest, because the wildness of his numbers, and the obscurity of his allu-

sions, were by no means suitable to the genius of the Latin language: and this may, perhaps, explain his ode to Julius Antonius, who might have advised him to use more of Pindar's manner in celebrating the victories of Augustus. Whatever we may think of this objection, it is certain that the Turkish empire has produced a great number of poets; some of whom had no small merit in their way: the ingenious author just mentioned assured me, that the Turkish satires of Ruhi Bagdadi were very forcible and striking, and he mentioned the opening of one of them, which seemed not unlike the manner of Juvenal. At the beginning of the last century, a work was published at Constantinople, containing the finest verses of five hundred and forty-nine Turkish poets, which proves at least that they are singularly fond of this art, whatever may be our opinion of their success in it.

The descendants of Tamerlane carried into India the language and poetry of the Persians; and the Indian poets to this day compose their verses in imitation of them. The best of their works, that have passed through my hands, are those of Huzein, who lived at Benares, with a great reputation for his parts and learning, and was known to the English, who resided there, by the name of the philosopher. His poems are elegant and lively, and one of them, on the departure of his friends, would suit the language admirably well, but it is too long to be inserted in this essay. The Indians are soft and voluptuous, but artful and insincere, at least to the Europeans, whom, to say

the truth, they have had no great reason of late years to admire for the opposite virtues: but they are fond of poetry, which they learned from the Persians, and may, perhaps, before the close of the century, be as fond of a more formidable art, which they will learn from the English.

I must request, that, in bestowing these praises on the writings of Asia, I may not be thought to derogate from the merit of the Greek and Latin poems, which have justly been admired in every age; yet I cannot but think that European poetry has subsisted too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images, and incessant allusions to the same fables: and it has been my endeavour for several years to inculcate this truth, that, if the principal writings of the Asiatics, which are deposited in our public libraries, were printed with the usual advantage of notes and illustrations, and if the languages of the Eastern nations were studied in our great seminaries of learning, where every other branch of useful knowledge is taught to perfection, a new and ample field would be opened for speculation; we should have a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind; we should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes; and a number of excellent compositions would be brought to light, which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate.

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